

Peter Wolfgang, President
Family Institute of Connecticut Action
Testimony in Opposition to HB6410



Family Institute of Connecticut Action opposes HB 6410 AA Establishing A Working Group Concerning Safe Online Practices for the following reasons:

This bill sets the groundwork for tracking and punishing “negative online behaviors” that local and state officials may view as “offensive”. There is already a wide body of federal and state law that addresses protected speech and harassment and it includes online communications. Additional study and “additional penalties” are not necessary except to threaten and stifle the free speech of organizations and individuals the current legislative body deems impolite or impudent.

The working group is not directed to establish “safe practices” as the title suggests, but seeks to create a tracking and reporting mechanism of citizens and organizations who will be deemed “offensive” by state and local officials.

CGS 53a-182(b) and 53a-183 already establish severe punishments for harassment and we have a reporting system called the Connecticut State Police and local police, State Attorney General and local criminal enforcement. Our state and local governments should not be creating additional lists of citizens whose content they decide is “offensive” or “threatening” outside of existing criminal law and subject to due process.

Another problem with the bill is it does not require the working group to consider actual examples in Connecticut of online activity they would deem to be “harassment.” It also lacks sufficient representation of those groups or citizens who are set up to be targeted. Thirdly, the bill inserts a “right to be free from harassment” which is unduly vague and untethered from actual law.

A quick review of the list of testimony filed against the bill suggest the following provision and the bill adjusted to add:

“Two appointed by the working group to represent organizations who filed testimony against the Act during public testimony.”

For these and other reasons, the Family Institute of Connecticut Action opposes HB 6410.